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16 June 1956

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OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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DIA and DOS review(s) completed.

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25X1A

CONTENTS

1. NEW SYRIAN CABINET PROBABLY DOMINATED BY
LEFTISTS [REDACTED]

25X1A

2. BRITAIN FAVORS EVENTUAL NEUTRALIZATION OF LAOS

25X1A [REDACTED]

25X1

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THE ARAB-ISRAELI SITUATION

[REDACTED]
25X1A

16 June 56

Current Intelligence Bulletin

Page 2

25X1A

25X1A

1. NEW SYRIAN CABINET PROBABLY DOMINATED BY LEFTISTS

25X1A

The composition of the new 11-member "national" cabinet in Syria headed by Prime Minister Sabri al Asali indicates continued government weakness, susceptibility to army influence, and a

sharper turn to the left. Three ministers are probably conservatives; the other eight are leftists, opportunistic "independents," and amenable party wheelhorses.

Among these eight are the ministers of foreign affairs and national economy who are members of the strongly anti-Western Arab Socialist Resurrection Party. Salah al-Din al-Bitar, the new foreign minister, is a member of the party's executive committee. This party will probably dominate the cabinet, since its popular anti-Western reform program, its control of "the street," and its influence in the army have enabled it to exert influence far beyond its small parliamentary strength.

The Arab Resurrection Party's inclusion in the government is clear evidence of the waning influence of the conservative parties--the "old Arab nationalists" who fought for Syria's independence from France. The composition of the cabinet also reflects the rise of the new nationalists--the younger educated elements, who are pressing for social and economic reform, are hostile to foreign "interference," extremely bitter over the establishment of Israel, and view Egyptian prime minister Nasr as the symbol of the future. The Arab Resurrection Party is a vigorous supporter of Syrian alignment with Egypt, co-operates with the Communist Party, supports Syrian purchase of arms from the Soviet bloc, and most recently has urged recognition of Communist China.

25X1A

16 June 56

Current Intelligence Bulletin

Page 3

25X1A

2. BRITAIN FAVORS EVENTUAL NEUTRALIZATION OF LAOS

25X1A



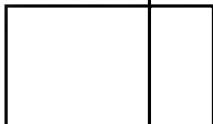
The British Foreign Office has expressed the view to the American embassy in London that Laos should in the long run be neutralized, since it would probably

[redacted]
be "more of a liability than an asset as an ally." The Foreign Office did not seem particularly concerned over the projected visit of Laotian premier Souvanna to Peiping, but was concerned that Souvanna should not throw away his bargaining position there.

Comment

Britain has never excluded the expedient of neutralizing Laos, if necessary, to remove a possible source of conflict with the Chinese Communists.

25X1



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Souvanna and other Laotian leaders, feeling uncertain of Western military support in case of an emergency, are already tempted to accept Communist inducements to become neutral. The British attitude, if conveyed to the Laotians at this time, would weaken their determination to remain firm in dealing with the Chinese Communists and might well be decisive in swinging Laos to neutralism.

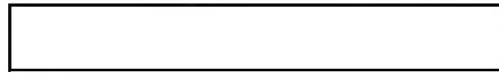
25X1

16 June 56

Current Intelligence Bulletin

Page 4

25X1A



25X1

Approved For Release 2004/03/26 : CIA-RDP79T00975A002600160001-5

Approved For Release 2004/03/26 : CIA-RDP79T00975A002600160001-5

25X1A

THE ARAB-ISRAELI SITUATION
(Information as of 1700, 15 June)

The Lebanese deputy chief of staff has stated that Lebanese forces along the Israeli border will be reduced to normal strength in a fairly short time. About a third of the infantry and all the antiaircraft artillery units moved to the border as an emergency measure have already returned to regular stations.

25X1A

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The commander in chief of the Egyptian navy has told the American naval attaché in Cairo that Egypt will receive submarines and that he has sent 220 naval personnel to the USSR for flight and mechanical training in naval aviation. The Egyptian officer also indicated a Soviet admiral had visited him three times in Alexandria to discuss naval assistance.

25X1

25X1

16 June 56

Current Intelligence Bulletin

Page 6

25X1A